Subject: Control of the Library

Gaines, Ruth

[Huntington Library + Reading Room
9 Westchester Sq., NYC]

August 31, 1933

HUNTINGTON FREE LIBRARY AND READING ROOM
9 WESTCHESTER SQUARE
NEW YORK CITY

RUTH GAINES
LIBRARIAN

August 31, 1933

To the Board of Trustees
Huntington Free Library and Reading Room
New York City

Dear Sirs:

For some time I have considered, with patience and care, the action taken by the Board in appointing Mr. E. K. Burnett as Director of this Library--an action of which I, together with the several employees of the Library, was first notified post facto, by letter dated June 13th, 1933.

"For some time," the letter addressed to the Librarian reads, "they [the Board] have felt that a definite division of responsibility existing in our organization seems to have resulted im a certain lack of cordination in the institution as a whole. To remedy this unfortunate defect" Mr. E. K. Burnett was placed by the Board "in complete charge of the Library."

I call to your attention the provisions of the Deed of Gift of the Huntington Free Library and Reading Room relative to (a) the functions of the Trustees, in appointing a Librarian, and (b) the functions of the Librarian as laid down in this same instrument. To wit:

The Trustees are:(Art.9) "To appoint at a fixed salary a librarian who shall not be one of their number, and to remove him at will." There is no provision here or elsewhere in the Deed of Gift authorizing the Board to appoint a Director.

(Art. 20) "To do and perform all things hereinafter provided for and all things necessary to the proper exercise and discharge of their trust: the Trustees shall give to the Librarian an immediate supervision of the institution, power to prescribe the duties of his subordinates and such other powers as will enable him to control them and justly be held responsible for their good conduct, the general maintenance of order and the observance of the rules..."

(1) This power, vested in the Librarian, was never exercised by her, having first been divided by Mr. Heye. At the express request of Mr. Heye, it was later delegated to Mr. Burnett on his initial appointment "as an experiment." That is, Mr. Burnett was given immediate supervision of the physical maintenance of the Library and control of the corps of Superintendent and Janitor. Further, the Janitor was made answerable to the Superintendent, through whom, in all matters requiring his assistance, janitorial or otherwise, the Librarian was required to relay requests. In case of friction, superintendent, janitor and librarian had equal recourse to Mr. Burnett or Mr. Heye. Apparently all such difficulties were then passed on to the Board. This state of things was not the intention of the Founder, nor can the Librarian justly be held responsible for it.

The Librarian has taken this recourse on three occasions in three years,—the last time in May, 1933, when she asked that the work directed by the Superintendent be so rearranged as to admit of answering the door-bell during the hours when the Library was open to the public. Instead, the Superintendent was upheld, the Library closed for three months, and, presumably, the action taken of appointing Mr. E. K. Burnett Director. That is:

(2) When "lack of coordination" in this "division of responsibility" resulted last May, the Librarian was not consulted by the Board, nor were her original powers, ample to administer, confirmed. Instead she was, unheard by the Board, superseded by Mr. E. K. Burnett.

Believing that the Board has exceeded its authority in taking from the Librarian the powers vested in her by the Deed of Gift, and in appointing a Director over her;

Believing also that Mr. E. K. Burnett, whose major professional experience has been that of a chiropodist, is not a happy choice for the active Directorship of this Library;

Being further confirmed in these beliefs by Mr. E. K. Burnett's procedure at the first conference called by him as Director—a conference at which the Librarian was ushered into an office where, unknown to her, the Superintendent was already seated, and at which said Superintendent, E. F. Coffin, was allowed to call her a liar and unwarrantedly to asperse her and the Assistant Librarian (not present); at which she was also informed, in the presence of said E. F. Coffin, that Mr. Burnett and not herself, would hereafter give orders;

I protest that, in my opinion such appointment of a Director by the Board is not in accordance with the terms of the Deed of Gift, and that such procedure on the part of the Director—to say nothing of that of a subordinate controlled by him—is not in accordance with these terms, nor with the usages of the learned professions—certainly not in accordance with library usage.

And I further submit that, in my opinion, it is improper for the Board to ask me to serve as Librarian under any Director in this Library, and that it is professionally improper for me to concur with the Board in thus serving under Mr. E. K. Burnett.

I, therefore, refuse so to serve.

At the same time, I beg to call to the attention of the Board my services performed in good faith, my cooperation, even to the point of nullifying my vested authority, and the damage done me professionally by abrogating this authority.

In all earnestness, I ask the Board to consider that it has a trust to perform, both to the public and to its faithful employees. Neither the reputation of the Library nor that of those who conscientiously serve it should suffer possible public humiliation at its hands.

I would add that I am not resigning, and that, should the Chairman of the Board so desire, I am ready to resume my duties as Librarian, with the provisos: That I be confirmed in my proper powers by the Board; That Mr. E. K. Burnett have no official office whatsoever in this Library; That your faithful Assistant Librarian, Miss Inger Tarpgaard, who goes out with me, return with me.

To Mr. Burnett and to Mr. Newell I have already reported serious grievances occasioned Miss Tarpgaard by E. F. Coffin. Mr. Burnett's reply was that he would not think of taking too seriously the statements of an angry man. But why angry, and why were similar statements given weight in May? Mr. Newell has made no acknowledgment as yet.

In order not to embarrass the program of the Board, nor to come in conflict with its accredited agent, Mr. E. K. Burnett, who, I understand, will have offices here, I am moving at once from the Library building and will not be in attendance.

In order also to protect myself from the possibility of further professional and personal indignities, I would appreciate it if any communication from the Board hereafter be made me in care of Allan R. Campbell, Attorney, 90 Broad Street, New York City.

Very truly yours,

Richard Gaines

Librarian

Distribution

Original to: Archer M. Huntington, Esq., President of the Board
Mrs. Archer M. Huntington

Copies to: Dr. George G. Heye, First Vice-President
Howland Wood, Esq., Second Vice-President
E. T. Newell, Esq., Secretary

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Howland Wood, Ssq., Second Vice-President
Board of Directors
Huntington Free Library and Reading Room

American Numismatic Society
Broadway at 156th Street
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